

Coeur d'Alene Teen Program 'Let the Games Begin'

A Success Thanks to Wal-Mart Grant

Coeur d'Alene Public Library opened the doors of its beautiful new facility in 2007. Library staff had previously only been able to focus on services for children, but the new facility's space and floor plan allowed for the addition of a much needed teen space. Population statistics showed that almost a quarter of Coeur d'Alene's residents were under the age of 18, but beyond school activities the community offered very few entertainment options for tweens and teens. The library created "Teen Central," an enclosed space in the new facility for teens to congregate, collaborate, and have fun.



In the first few years the library saw an increase in the number of teens accessing the space; however they knew there were many more that were not coming through the library's doors. They set about researching new and exciting programs to engage their tweens and teen and help increase attendance and circulation, then developed a gaming program to meet their identified needs.

"Gaming to support literacy is not new to librarians who see electronic gaming technology as a way to develop critical thinking and teamwork," Library Director Bette Ammon said. "Electronic gaming has not only been very popular in libraries across the country, but has promoted increased general library use among teen users." She continued, "Most libraries see an increase in overall teen reading and book circulation – indeed, programming like this has been shown to ignite teen interest in libraries." This research prompted the library to submit a grant requesting funds to install a complete gaming system in the library.

A \$7,000 award through Wal-Mart's "Strengthening Library Services for Youth" grant opportunity allowed for the installation of a complete gaming system, and the Coeur d'Alene staff was ready to *Let the Games Begin!*

An effective team consisting of the library director, IT coordinator, communications coordinator, and two clerks helped ensure the success of the program. They developed the list of items to purchase, which included three Wii units, carts, projector, monitors and many software titles. The library also developed a strong marketing campaign to help promote their events. Regular publicity went out to local newspapers and email lists and they kept their website updated with current programming information and schedules. Having a communications coordinator responsible for marketing the program was an important component to their overall success.



Partnerships were also a key factor in the creation of an effective program and collaboration with Sorensen Magnet School was one such partnership. Sixty fifth-graders helped them plan initial pilot programs and participated in the activities throughout the grant period. "Teens can not only participate but can also assist in overseeing programs and creating new programs," Ammon said.

In addition to gaming programs, the library planned and hosted several well-attended young adult programs including poetry slams, teen karaoke nights, teen video festivals, and virtual book discussions. They will continue to feature these events in addition to the gaming programs on a regular basis.



Many libraries and other organizations have discovered that interest in games is cross generational. During an annual volunteer breakfast several teens demonstrated and taught the Wii gaming to senior volunteers. The library has plans to develop intergenerational programs to extend the connection between the teens and seniors. They plan to use the

equipment and software to provide even more extensive programming to seniors in the near future. Teens may continue act as mentors for these programs as well given the past success.

The outcomes from the program have been extremely positive. Young adult circulation increased by 6.4 percent during the grant period and the library estimates that over 400 teens participated in programs. In addition, over 1,000 youth and children's library cards were issued the during the time period. Tweens and teens are using the library in ever increasing numbers. "Having the video gaming program certainly contributed to the library's 'cool' factor," Ammon said.

The library had envisioned the creation of a young adult advisory board which would actively participate in the planning and development of teen programming and services. Due to staffing constraints they were not able to fulfill this vision. However, they have two teen representatives who regularly attend monthly library board meetings and actively contribute ideas concerning programming and materials for their age group. The library is confident that an advisory board will be created when staffing increases.

Another great outcome from the project has been in the area of staff development. Staff members who participated in the program are more enthusiastic and in tune with young adults and able to meet their needs more effectively. Overall, the library could not be more pleased with the results of the program and the long term effects it will have on the teens in their community.